

Hemichromis letourneuxi Sauvage 1880
African Jewelfish



Photo by H. Jelks, USGS

Identification: The species is a small, oval-shaped fish that is brightly colored, especially during the mating season. Background body coloration is highly variable, and can be green-yellow to bright red or even dark (almost black), depending on the time of year, habitat and/or disposition (e.g., fear or aggression level) of the fish. It has blue spangling on the head, body, and fins that is more pronounced in breeding adults. There is a dark black lateral spot above the lateral line, although it is not always visible. A relatively small fish, it grows to about 7 cm SL (maximum size is approximately 12 cm SL). It is difficult to discriminate amongst *Hemichromis* species, in part due to the wide variation in coloration within species and small meristic and morphological differences between species. Loisel (1979) revised the genus *Hemichromis* and provided diagnoses, photographs, and synonyms for the species. An updated key to the genus was given in Loisel (1992). Most published references to populations of this species from Florida before the 1990s were listed as *H. bimaculatus*, but are now thought to have been *H. letourneuxi*. Often misspelled as *H. letourneauxi*. Dorsal spines XIII to XV, anal spines III (Page and Burr 1991).

Similar Species: Clown Wrasse (*Halichoeres maculipinna*) has a dark spot on the dorsal fin.

Native Range: The species is native to Central and Western Africa. It occurs south of the Sahara Desert in the savannah floodplain and in the middle and lower reaches of the Nile River (Bailey 1994; Hickley and Bailey 1986 and 1987; Lamboj 1994; Loisel 1979 and 2000; Lowe-McConnell 1991).

Ecology: The species occurs in shallow vegetated or rocky areas in marshes, along river banks, and on the margins of canals and culverts. It is occasionally observed in shallow estuarine areas, such as mangrove-lined creeks. It is an aggressive species, and it is thought that this characteristic has allowed it to spread across the southern portion of the Florida peninsula in syntopy with other (larger) cichlid species (Loftus and Kushlan 1987). The African Jewelfish is an opportunistic carnivore, feeding on invertebrates and small fishes (Hickley and Bailey 1987; Loftus et al. 2006). When spawning, females deposit their adhesive eggs on hard substrates.

Nonindigenous Occurrences: The species was first documented in south Florida in the Hialeah Canal-Miami River Canal system, Miami area, by Rivas (1965). It is now established and abundant in many canals in and around the Miami/Homestead area (Courtenay et al. 1974; Hogg 1976; Loftus and Kushlan 1987) as well as Everglades National Park and Big Cypress National Preserve. The African Jewelfish is present along the Gulf coast of Florida in Charlotte Harbor and in the lower Caloosahatchee, Peace and Alafia rivers. It is tolerant of salinity, and is periodically collected in estuarine regions adjacent to freshwater systems where it is established.

